

proper treatment offers real hope. They help remind everyone as to why we must continue to press forward. The task that remains is staggering, but we are committed.

Later today, President Trump will help our country take another step forward. We expect that he will formally recognize the opioid epidemic for the public health emergency that it is. This announcement builds upon years of progress that Congress has made in responding to addiction with comprehensive action, including prevention, enforcement, and treatment.

I commend the President for his continued commitment to this cause. When he visited us in the Senate earlier this week, he discussed the national epidemic and his administration's efforts to fight back. Along with my colleagues, I stand ready to work with him on future proposals to provide the necessary tools to protect our communities from this scourge.

A single bill or program is never going to solve this crisis on its own. Only a sustained, committed effort can do that. I am proud of our efforts to combat opioid addiction already. I also know that we will continue to push forward with continued collaboration with many groups both in Washington and in States and communities all across our country so that, one day, we can finally say that our country has beaten this crisis once and for all.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader is recognized.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, yesterday afternoon the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office came out with a score for the bipartisan Alexander-Murray bill. The CBO report confirms that the Alexander-Murray bill is a great deal for the American people. It does precisely what it was intended to do. It stabilizes the marketplaces, helps to prevent premiums from skyrocketing, and reduces the deficit, by CBO's estimate, nearly \$4 billion.

As Senators ALEXANDER and MURRAY noted, the report shows that their bill "will benefit taxpayers and low-income Americans, not insurance companies."

Even the Wall Street Journal editorial board—no liberal cabal, that is for sure—said today: "The bipartisan compromise proposal crafted by Sens.

LAMAR ALEXANDER (R-Tenn.) and PATTY MURRAY (D-Wash.) now officially falls into the category of 'so obvious it should pass immediately.'"

That is not CHUCK SCHUMER talking. That is not even MITCH MCCONNELL talking—for those on the hard right who might doubt MITCH MCCONNELL's fidelity. It is the beacon of the hard right, the Wall Street Journal editorial page.

They say, again: Alexander-Murray "falls into the category of 'so obvious it should pass immediately.'"

So, my fellow Republicans, what are you waiting for? Everyone on your side wants the bill. Jump on it. Support it. Let's get this done, and let's help stabilize our markets, whatever our views are on healthcare.

Above all, these reports should be all the evidence that President Trump needs to come off the sidelines and endorse the bill. It doesn't bail out the insurance companies; that is what he said he was worried about. It doesn't cost the government money, and, in fact, it reduces the deficit by \$4 billion. So there is no good reason for President Trump to continue to obscure his position.

Leader MCCONNELL has said he will put it on the floor if the President says he will sign it. By delaying, the President is harming healthcare markets, causing significant uncertainty, and doing nothing but hurting Americans who are trying to afford healthcare.

So, Mr. President—President Trump, not my dear friend, the Acting President pro tempore, the Senator from Alabama—President Trump, if you don't pursue this bill, the consequences will fall on your back. Make no mistake about it.

THE BUDGET

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, on taxes, later today, the House will likely vote on whether to pass the budget resolution that recently passed the Senate. My colleagues in the House should be aware that this budget will explode the deficit by \$1.5 trillion. That is under the best of circumstances. That is under circumstances where they find \$4 trillion of pay-fors. That is probably unlikely. It will slash Medicare and Medicaid by \$1.5 trillion, and it will set up the same awful partisan process that caused the Republican effort on repeal and replace to fail, because when you try to do it with one party, it is fraught with peril. If you do it in a bipartisan way, a few people on either side will try to pull the bill off course but they will not succeed because they don't have the votes.

I remind my friends in the House who purport to be deficit hawks: You are voting for a budget that will increase the deficit by \$1.5 trillion. Many of these House Members, particularly in the conservative wing of the caucus, particularly those in the Freedom Caucus, have spent their entire careers on the barricades, railing against the evils

of deficits. What a stunning hypocrisy it would be to abandon those principles today and vote for this budget simply because it gives tax cuts to the wealthiest of Americans and the most powerful, largest of our corporations.

Now I would also remind my Republican friends in the House—particularly those in New York, New Jersey, California, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Illinois, Washington, and Minnesota—that voting for the budget today is tantamount to voting for the elimination of the State and local tax deduction, and that would sock it to the middle-class taxpayers in their States and districts. To most of our Republican friends from those States, they are blue States, but there are red districts that are suburban, well-off. They will get clobbered if they take away the State and local deduction. Those are the constituents hurt the most—not the rich and not the poor—the middle class and the upper middle class. Not only will it raise their taxes dramatically, but most people would lose deductions between \$10,000 and \$20,000. That ain't chickenfeed.

It would lower home prices. A recent study by the National Association of Realtors done by Pricewaterhouse Coopers, the esteemed accounting firm, showed that eliminating State and local would erode property values, the rock of the middle class, by 10 percent. To middle-class folks in New York and, I believe, around the country, their home is their piece of the rock. They struggle each month, paying the mortgage, paying the taxes, paying for the upkeep, but they are hoping that by the time they reach later middle age they will own that home, and that gives their kids a place or gives their kids a nest egg when they pass it on. But this bill, by eliminating State and local, reduces across America, on average, home values by 10 percent. So it is a double whammy to the middle class, raising their taxes and lowering their home values. Why would we do that?

You don't have to take it from me. I will tell this to my Republican colleagues. PETER KING is a hard, rock-ribbed Republican who has a lot of courage and who this morning was on TV talking about investigating Hillary Clinton, but here is what he said about repealing the State and local deduction. He said that it "will devastate my district forever." That is a solid middle-class and upper middle-class Republican district on Long Island.

Here is what else PETER KING said: "How anybody from New York and New Jersey can vote for this budget without knowing what is in the tax bill is beyond me." He was referring to the State and local tax deductions.

I salute PETER KING for telling it like it is. Having the courage to stand up and say to his own party's leadership: I will not forsake my constituents for a tax bill when I don't even know what the details will be. The remaining Members of the New York, New Jersey, California, and other delegations have

a decision to make. Will they protect the middle class and tens of thousands of homeowners in their districts or go along with the hard-right agenda that will cost their constituents hard-earned money for groceries, home repairs, and other needs, and do that all so that the very wealthy can get a huge tax break and all so that the biggest corporations which are flush with money can have even more money—wrong.

I hear on the other side that we are talking about a tax bill for the middle class. To eliminate State and local deductibility hurts the majority of middle-class people in this country. That is what will happen if they keep that in there.

Now, some will say, in the House—and I have heard one of my colleagues from New York, a Republican: Oh, that SCHUMER is a Democrat; he is beating up on Republicans. But I went through this in 1986, the last time we had tax reform. It was the Democrats who were pushing the bill—Senator Bradley, a legend in this Chamber, and Leader Gephardt, one of the Democratic leaders in the House. Despite their entreaties, I told them not only would I not vote for any reform bill that had State and local deductibility in it, but I would lead the charge and round up others, and I did. I got a lot of flak from my fellow Democrats, but it was the right thing to do for my middle-class constituency in southern Brooklyn. So when I ask our Republican colleagues to buck their leadership to help their middle-class constituents, it is something I did with the Democratic leadership the last time tax reform was on the floor.

Some are already rationalizing their vote to approve the budget by putting their hopes in the vague possibility of some kind of compromise on State and local deductibility. The harsh fact is, there is no good compromise to be had on State and local. If you want to make taxpayers choose between the mortgage deduction and the State and local, it is like asking taxpayers to decide whether they want to cut off their right arm or their left arm. Some are talking about a cap. Well, where are you going to cap it? More than 50 percent of the total value of the deduction goes to taxpayers with incomes below \$200,000. Cap it too low, and almost all those middle-class taxpayers get whacked. Cap it too high, and it doesn't raise enough money to offset all the cuts my Republican friends want to give the corporations and the top 1 percent. Republicans in the House shouldn't stake the votes on the prospect of a good compromise on State and local because there is not one to be had.

The bottom line is, any Republican plan that limits SALT is the equivalent of robbing middle-class families of tax benefits and handing it over to the wealthiest Americans and biggest corporations. There is no—no—compelling reason to do it. People aren't clam-

oring for it. We don't need to take a trillion dollars from working families and give it to millionaire CEOs, period.

If that weren't enough reason to vote no, the Republican leadership is still debating capping pretax contributions to 401(k) plans. Do you hear that, retirees and potential retirees? In their craving thirst to give the wealthiest people in America a tax break, they are going to say: You can't save money for retirement tax-free. What a gut punch to the middle class that would be. Despite the President's claims to the contrary, Representative BRADY and Senator PORTMAN have said that a 401(k) cap is still on the table.

So do you know what this bill has become? Again, in its desperation to help the wealthiest, it is like a quiz show. Which way do we hurt the middle class to pay for it? Door one is State and local deductibility. Door two is cap retirement. Who knows what they will pick in door three? It could be the mortgage deduction. Asking middle-class people to choose which poison to take so they can help the wealthiest makes no sense.

I would urge my colleagues in the House and here in the Senate: Stop doing this partisan bill that was dictated by the hard right, very wealthy individuals, very rich corporations, huge corporations. Work with us. We want to create a bipartisan bill that helps the middle class. We are for tax reform, and we can get something done.

Please stop this train in its tracks early on before it is too late and you will regret it. There are large numbers of Democrats, including this minority leader, who want to sit down with Republicans and come up with a deficit-neutral, middle-class, small business-oriented, bipartisan tax relief bill, not a plan to benefit the richest 1 percent or the largest and most powerful corporations that are already flush with cash. We want to work with our Republican colleagues on a real bipartisan deal. Defeat this budget, and we will.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the Palk nomination, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Scott L. Palk, of Oklahoma, to be United States District Judge for the Western District of Oklahoma.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from West Virginia.

TAX REFORM

Ms. CAPITO. Mr. President, I rise to again highlight the importance of enacting tax reform. I listened to the Democratic leader's speech. I have heard that speech a thousand times—a thousand times how only wealthy Americans are going to benefit from anything the Republicans can come up with. Well, do you know what? Americans are smarter than that. Americans are smarter than that.

I represent a State, West Virginians who have struggling economic situations. If I were to go out on the street in West Virginia, and as I talked to individuals there, and asked them: Would you like more of your hard-earned money at the end of the day and have a tax cut and tax relief, I can guarantee you 100 percent would say: Heck, yeah. I can spend my money better at home with my priorities than what you are doing in Washington, DC. So let's not let that argument rule the day. As I said, we are smarter than that.

Let's talk about what this bill does. This is now my fourth, actually, in a series of something I believe in, which is tax reform for everybody in this country.

My first speech described the benefits we will have in economic growth. Something that was not mentioned by the previous speaker is how we have been stagnated for so long. The economic growth will rise all boats. Every middle-class worker will benefit from this, and every small business will benefit from this. My second speech was about small businesses. Ninety-five percent of my State is small business. Last week, I highlighted the importance of passing the budget resolution to allow Congress to move forward, and we did that.

Today, I want to talk about the importance of tax reform for middle-class families and the impacts this bill will have on them, the very real impact. You know what, raising a family is very expensive today. A recent study from the Department of Agriculture found that middle-income households will spend over \$230,000 raising a child. It is staggering—staggering.

The Federal Reserve found that almost half of American families are struggling right now to come up with \$400 if they have an emergency expense. In West Virginia, where the median income is \$41,000—hardly the wealthy—families are forced to make hard tradeoffs as they balance their checkbooks each month.

Expenses are going up. Yet most Americans haven't received a raise in years. So we need to help working families, especially those living paycheck to paycheck, and this is one of the primary goals of our tax reform. We want middle-class, middle-earned-income